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HCI
HIAWATHA COMMUNICATIONS

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Rails-to-Trails Testimonial

November 28, 2011

My full name is James P. Brogan III; most people call me Jay. I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of Hiawatha Communications Incorporated (HCI). HCI is headquartered in Munising, Michigan and owns four Independent Local Exchange Carriers, an Internet service provider, and a long distance company. Each of these businesses operates in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I am also an Officer and managing partner for Peninsula Fiber Network LLC (PFN) which is a 50/50 partnership between HCI and the Baraga Telephone Company. PFN owns and operates an extensive fiber optic network throughout the entire Upper Peninsula. I have over 25 years of experience in the communications industry, specifically in Michigan.

If it is acceptable to this committee, I would like to provide my opinion on making the cost to access the Rails-to-Trails system in Michigan more affordable by passing SB499. Both broadband and wireless networks require a robust fiber optic backbone in order to serve the ever-increasing data needs of residential and business consumers. Many of Michigan's rural areas have great distances between population centers, and often times, these distances span over very difficult terrain. Building and maintaining a sound fiber optic network in rural Michigan can often be challenging and extremely costly. At the same time, it is certainly no secret the availability of broadband service to businesses helps create and maintain financial success and ultimately much needed jobs. As for the residents of these rural areas, broadband availability assists in educating our population and promotes a better quality of life.

The use of the Rails-to-Trails system for deployment of fiber optics at affordable rates makes very good sense for the public and for providers. The original rail system/network was built with the same goal as today's broadband providers – connect the source of the product to the end user by using the most efficient and least costly means possible. Most of the deployment on these routes would be used to connect population centers. Equipment sites for distribution to end users, in most cases, would be unnecessary. Unlike many of the routes providers are using today, using the Rails-to-Trails system is less likely to create an interruption to the public and to the provider's facilities. Using the Rails-to-Trails system for broadband deployment also creates opportunities for redundancy expansion, which improves the service quality of critical data.

Your committee has an opportunity to help Michigan's broadband providers realize cost savings and opportunities for expansion. This ultimately helps create an incentive to invest high tech dollars in Michigan and helps make broadband services more affordable and accessible. I urge you to consider my opinion, vote in favor of SB499, and help improve the efficiency, quality, and accessibility of Michigan's broadband networks.

Respectfully,

James P. Brogan III (Jay)
President & CEO, Hiawatha Communications Inc.